



PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Regional Instability, Global Implications

The Middle East, straddling vital transportation links at the confluence of three continents, has long been a region of strategic importance. More recently, unrivalled concentrations of oil have bestowed on it a vital role in the world economy. The persistent violence and conflict that have plagued the Middle East for more than 40 years, and the tragic humanitarian conditions that have ensued, have been a critical concern for the entire international community.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The causes of strife in the Middle East are many and complex. One of the principal causes has been the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours: a formal declaration of war has been upheld by most Arab states against Israel since its founding in 1948. Since the 1967 Six-Day War, this conflict was exacerbated by Israel's occupation of territories in the Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the eastern sector of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Aside from the Camp David Accords and the Israel-Egypt peace agreement, which led to Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai in 1982, attempts to resolve the conflict have repeatedly failed. The significance of these accords, however, must be noted because they served as a blueprint for the ongoing peace process.

The Madrid Peace Process:

A) Bilateral Negotiations

The Madrid Peace Process, launched by the United States and the former Soviet Union in October 1991, is the latest effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time since the creation of Israel, Madrid brought together Arab, Israeli and Palestinian representatives to address the question of peace. It also produced a series of bilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbours, --namely Jordan, Syria and Lebanon -- and the Palestinians.

Eleven rounds of bilateral negotiations have been held in Washington. These negotiations have been long and difficult, reflecting the depth of emotions on all sides and the compromises that must be made to ensure a durable peace. The Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles, signed in Washington on September 13, 1993, and the Israel-Jordan Common Agenda, signed on September 14, were momentous breakthroughs, launching a new beginning for the Middle East. Similar progress is expected with Lebanon and Syria.

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